

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 705

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 608

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: GB
SUBJ: US GOALS AND OBJECTIVES IN GABON

REF: A. 77 STATE 291277 B. 77 STATE 295570 C. 77 STATE
297394 D. 78 STATE 057641

1. OVERVIEW: A. GABONESE POLITICAL STABILITY, WITH ALL
LEVELS OF POWER UNDER FIRM CONTROL OF PRESIDENT BONGO, SEEMS
LIKELY TO CONTINUE OVER COMING TWO YEARS. THERE IS NO
ORGANIZED INTERNAL OPPOSITION PRIMARLY BECAUSE OF BONGO'S
TIGHT CONTROL OVER SECURITY APPARATUS AND BECAUSE HE SEES
TO IT THAT WEALTH IS DISTRIBUTED WIDELY ENOUGH TO ASSUAGE
POTENTIAL OPPOSITION. THE GROWING NUMBER OF REFUGEES FROM
EQUATORIAL GUINEA COULD POSE SOME POTENTIAL PROBLEMS BUT
GABONESE SECURITY FORCES, REINFORCED BY FRENCH IF NECESSARY,
SEEM CAPABLE OF HANDLING ANY FORESEEABLE
SITUATION.

AFTER COMPLETION OF HIS TENURE AS OAU CHAIRMAN IN JULY 1988,
PRESIDENT BONGO WILL LIKELY BECOME MOR OUTSPOKEN ON AFRICAN
AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. PARTICULARLY WE FORESEE
CRITICISM OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA AND EXPOSITION
AT LEAST IN PRIVATE OF HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE THREAT TO
GABON FROM SOVIET/CUBAN ACTIVITY IN CONGO, EQUATORIAL

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GUINEA AND SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE. BONGO PROBABLY WILL
PURSUE GABONESE SECURITY CONCERNS WITH US AND MAY WELL REQUEST
ASSITANCE AT PRECISELY THE TIME THAT OUR FMS CREDITS FOR
GABON ARE SCHEDULED TO TERMINATE. OUR INABILITY TO RESPOND
WOULD REINFORCE THE DOMINANT FRENCH POSITION WITH GABONESE
MILITARY. THE OUTLOOK COULD BE ALTERED, HOWEVER, BY A
LEFT COALITION VICTORY IN THE 1978 FRENCH ELECTION IF THE

NEW FRENCH GOVERNMENT WERE TO REASSESS FRANCE'S SECURITY COMMITMENT INCLUDING THE STATIONING OF FORCES IN GABON. WITHOUT THE SUPPOSED ASSURANCE OF FRENCH INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT BONGO, GABONESE DOMESTIC SECURITY PROJECTIONS WOULD HAVE TO BE REASSESSED.

B. GABON IS FACING A SEVERE DEBT SQUEEZE AT THE PRESENT WHICH WILL CONTINUE DURING THE PERIOD UNDER CONSIDERATION. THE GOG HAS ANNOUNCED ADOPTION OF AN AUSTERITY PROGRAM. PRESSURE FROM CREDITORS, FOREIGN LENDERS AND INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND WILL CERTAINLY REQUIRE POSTPONEMENT OF SOME DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND FURTHER DELAYS IN OTHERS SUCH AS THE TRANSGABON RAILWAY. ASSUMING GOG MAINTAINS WILL TO ENFORCE AUSTERITY PROGRAM AND GIVEN GABON'S OVERALL ECONOMIC POTENTIAL ND RELATIVELY FAVORABLE LONGER TERM DEBT SITUATION. WE DO NOT FORESEE ANY DEFAULTING ON EXTERNAL DEBTS. RIGIN ENFORCEMENT OF THE AUSTERITY PROGRAM SHOULD, BY THE END OF 1979, SEE THE PROBLEM BEHIND GABON. AMERICAN AS WELL AS FRENCH BANKS MAY WELL BE INVOLVED IN LENDING FOR DEBT PAYMENTS. SHORT TEM DEBT PROBLEMS NOTWITHSTANDING, WE DO NOT BELIEVE US FIRMS SHOULD SHUN GABON OR AVOID PURSUING SERIOUS BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES WHICH ARE PROVIDED FOR IN GABON'S BUDGET. IN FACT WE NOTE AN INCREASING ACCEPTANCE OF ECONOMIC AND BEINESS COOPERATION WITH OTHER THAN FRENCH-BASED FIRMS. IN ADDITION TO AMERICAN, THE FRG, ITALY, SOUTH KOREA, SECRET

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YUGOSLAVIA AND THE PHILLIPPINES ARE ALL FAIRLY WELL ESTABLISHED AND WE DETECT AN UNDERSTANDING ON BEHALF OF THE FRENCH THAT SHARING THE WEALTH OF GABON ALSO INVOLVES SHARING THE RISKS. THE REALITY OF THE DEBT PROBLEM AND THE CONSEQUENT NEED FOR EXPANDED REVENUES WILL MOTIVATE GABON TO ALIGN ITSELF IN OPEC WITH THOSE COUNTRIES PURSUING PETROLEUM PRICE INCREASES. GABON'S VOICE IN OPEC, HOWEVER IS RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT.

2. WHERE WE STAND:

--THROUGH CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONS MAINTAINED BY THE CHIEF OF MISSION IN LIBREVILLE AND WITH THE IMMENSE ASSIST OF TWO 1977 MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENTS CARTER AND BONGO, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO REINFORCE BONGO'S AND THEREFORE GABON'S PRO-WESTERN, NON-IDEOLOGICAL INCLINATIONS. BONGO HAS BEEN APPRECIATIVE OF AND RECEPTIVE TO OUR SUGGESTIONS, REQUESTS AND CONSULTATIONS IN HIS OAU LEADERSHIP ROLE. OF LATE, HOWEVER, WE DETECT INCREASING FRUSTRATION ON HIS PART AS THE OAU FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE ANY OF THE MAJOR AFRICAN ISSUES. --ALTHOUGH WE RECEIVE SOME GABONESE SUPPORT AT THE

UNITED NATIONS ON ISSUES SUCH AS KOREA, GUAM OR PUERTO RICO, IN MOST INTERNATIONAL FORUMS GABON TENDS TO FOLLOW AFRICAN GROUP LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE G-77. IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW THE ROLE GABON PLAYS, BUT WE SUSPECT THAT IT WILL CONSISTANTLY ALIGN ITSELF WITH THE MORE MODERATE MEMBERS OF THOSE GROUPS.

--THE SUCCESSFUL LIBREVILLE PORT VISIT OF TWO US NAVY SHIPS, AND THE RESULTANT CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN US AND GABONESE ARMED FORCES, SOLIDIFIED SECURITY RELATIONS AND DEMOSTRATED TO PRESIDENT BONO, THE GABONESE AND RESIDENT FRENCH COMMUNITY USG SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP.
--OUR COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FRENCH HAS INCREASED, HELPED ALONG BY JOINT DEMARCHES MADE WITH FRENCH AND WEST GERMANS TO BONGO ON THE NAMIBIA CONTACT
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GROUP DISCUSSIONS. THE EMBASSY HAS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH THE FRENCH AT ALL DIPLOMATIC LEVELS, WITH FRENCHNCOFFICIALS SECONDED TO GOG AND WITH THE FRENCH BUSINESS COMMUNITY. FRENCH JEALOUSIES AND SUSPICIONS, HOWEVER, HAVE NOT TOTALLY DISSIPATED.
--US SUPPORT FOR GABONESE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HAS COME PRIMARILY IN THE FORM OF EXPORT/IMPORT BANK CREDITS, OPIC GUARANTEES, AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO SERIOUS POTENTIAL INVESTORS. FORMAL AID IS NEGLIGIBLE AT PRESENT BUT WE SHALL BE EXAMINING POSSIBILITIES FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE WITHIN CURRENT USAID GUIDELINES.

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 706

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 0608

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--THE PEACE CORPS PROGRAM IN SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND EDUCATION HAS CONTINUED SUCCESSFULLY WITH INCREASING ACCEPTABILITY BY GABONESE OFFICIALS. PCV ATTRITION RATE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM HAS BEEN UNUSUALLY HIGT.

--U.S. ACCESS TO GABON'S NATURAL RESOURCES HAS CONTINUED ALTHOUGH THE IRON-ORE EXPLORATION PROGRAM WITH U.S. PARTICIPATION IS BEING SUSPENDED WHICH MAY PROVOKE GABONESE TO SEEK ALTERNATIVE PARTNERS, SPECIFICALLY THE ROMANIANS. EXPLORATION FOR OIL BY ONE AMERICAN COMPANY CONTINUES WITHOUT ANY EXPLOITABLE DISCOVERIES.

--AMERICAN FIRMS SEEM TO BE RECEIVING MORE EQUITABLE TREATMENT IN COMPETING WITH FRENCH AND OTHERS FOR CONTRACTS IN GABON INCLUDING ON THE TRANS-GABON RAILROAD. THIS IS PARTIALLY DUE TO EMBASSY SUPPORT, INCREASED SOPHISTICATION BY U.S. FIRMS IN DOING BUSINESS IN GABON, AND CHANGING FRENCH AND GABONESE ATTITUDES.

--EDUCATIONAL: CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND INFORMATION PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN MAINTAINED AND EXPANDED CONSIDERABLY.

3. COURSES OF ACTION:

-- CONTINUE TO CULTIVATE CLOSE RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT BONGO, HIS PRINCIPAL MINISTERS AND ADVISORS. CONSULT
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WITH AND APPRISE HIM ABOUT U.S. POLICY INITIATIVES IN AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE THAT CONCERN GABON.

-- CONTINUE TO PUBLICIZE U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS AND EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR GABON'S DECLARED 1978 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TO DELIVER SOCIAL BENEFITS TO THE MOST DISADVANTAGED (WITH RECOGNITION THAT SUCH EXPRESSIONS WILL INEVITABLY ELICIT REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE).

-- CONTINUE TO PROVIDE ASSURANCES TO GABONESE OF USG CONCERN FOR THEIR SECURITY EVEN THOUGH FMS PROGRAM IS SCHEDULED TO TERMINATE IN FY 1978 AND PROBABLY WILL NOT BE REINSTITUTED. SCHEDULE MORE FREQUENT VISITS BY KINSHASA-BASED DEFENSE ATTACHES AND BE AS RESPONSIVE AS POSSIBLE TO REQUEST SUCH AS THAT FOR ASSISTANCE IN SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS FOR THE LOST HELICOPTER. SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE TRAINING AT GABONESE EXPENSE, TO THE GABONESE ARMED FORCES.

--CONSIDER SCHEDULING OCCASIONAL USN VISITS.

-- ENCOURAGE ACTIVE GABONESE PARTICIPATION IN ANTI-HIJACKING CONTACT GROUP.

MAINTAIN CLOSE RELATIONS WITH FRENCH AMBASSADOR, WHO IS DEAN OF CORPS, AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF FRENCH COMMUNITY.

-- CONTINUE TO ASSOCIATE WITH FRENCH ON AFRICAN OR

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES WHERE POLICIES ARE IDENTICAL,
OR DEVELOPED IN COMMON SUCH AS WITHIN THE NAMIBIA CONTACT
GROUP.

-- THROUGH CAREFUL GROUNDWORK, HANDLE CANCELLATION OF
OUTSTANDING \$7 MILLION ACCESS ROADS LOAN
IN MANNER WHICH WILL NOT BE INTERPRETED BY GABONESE AS
LACK OF SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.
-- INVESTIGATE USE OF PL 480 OR OTHER REIMBURSABLE AID
PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO GABONESE DEVELOPMENT,
PARTICULARLY AGRICULTURE WHICH IS EMPHASIZED IN GABON'S
THIRD DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

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-- ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY, FUND AND COMPLETE ONE OR TWO
SMALL SELF-HELP PROGRAMS IN RURAL AREAS.
-- REDUCE GRADUALLY PEACE CORPS ENGLISH TEACHING PROGRAM
(EXCEPT AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL) AND INCREASE PROGRAMS IN
BASIS HUMAN NEEDS SUCH AS HEALTH/NUTRITION AND FOOD/WATER
UTILIZING APPROPRIATE (LOCAL) TECHNOLOGY.
-- CONTINUE EFFORTS AT ALL LEVELS TO SUPPORT AMERICAN
FIRMS AND INSURE THEIR EQUITABLE TREATMENT.
-- BEGIN PUBLICATION OF COMMERCIAL NEWSLETTER.
-- MAINTAIN CLOSE TIES WITH FINANCIAL COMMUNITY WITH
REGARD TO AUSTERITY PROGRAM. CONTINUE TO PROMOTE US
EXPORTS THROUGH MEANS OF EXPORT/IMPORT BANK CREDITS AS
JUSTIFIABLE.
-- EXPLAIN TO GOG THAT NON-DEVELOPMENT OF IRON ORE
RESERVES AT THE PRESENT TIME BY U.S. AND OTHER SHAREHOLDERS
DOES NOT REFLECT LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN GABON BUT RATHER
WORLD STEEL SITUATION.
-- EXPAND ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM AT CULTURAL
CENTER.
-- EXPAND OTHER CULTURAL AND INFORMATION PROGRAMS WITH
ARRIVAL OF SECOND USIS OFFICER IN JUNE 1978.

4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS:

A. STATE -- WITH THE RECENT DECISION TO INCREASE
LIBREVILLE'S AFRECON RESPONSIBILITIES, AND THE ASSIGNMENT
OF A THIRD COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORD OFFICER, AND WITH
THE DECISION TO ASSIGN A SECOND USIS OFFICER, WE PROPOSE
TO ASSESS AGAIN THE CAPABILITY OF EMBASSY ADMINISTRATIVE
SECTION TO PROVIDE BASIC MINIMAL SUPPORT FOR OVERALL
PROGRAMS. AT PRESENT, ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION IS
STAFFED BY ONE AMERICAN ASSISTED BY HIGH COST TCN FSL'S
(ONE OF WHOM EARNS MORE THAN THE DCM AND OTHERS WHO
EARN MORE THAN SEVERAL AMERICAN MEMBERS OF THE STAFF).
ADDITION OF GSO COULD RESULT IN MANAGERIAL IMPROVEMENT,
BE MORE COST EFFECTIVE AND REDUCE RELIANCE ON EXPENSIVE
FSL EMPLOYEES. WITH THIS CAVEAT, STATE RESOURCES, AS

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PRESENTLY ALLOCATED, ARE SUFFICIENT TO PERMIT
ACHIEVEMENT OF OUR PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES IN GABON.

B. USIS -- WITH THE ARRIVAL OF A SECOND OFFICER
(ALREADY INCLUDED IN BUDGETARY PROJECTIONS) APPROXIMATELY
\$5,000 ADDITIONAL ANNUALLY WILL BE REQUIRED FOR
EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING, THIS IN PART DUE TO INCREASED,
AND UNTIL THE PRESENT, UNFILLED OPPORTUNITIES A SECOND
USIS OFFICER WILL PERMIT, AND IN PART BECAUSE OF
OPENING OF SECOND TELEVISION AND RADIO CHANNELS WHICH
REQUIRE EXPANDED INFORMATION PLACEMENT. THE EVER-
GROWING AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRAINING
PROGRAM WILL REQUIRE ABOUT AN ADDITIONAL \$3,500 TO MEET
MINIMAL EXPANSION.

C. PEACE CORPS/AID--PEACE CORPS PROJECTIONS AS
PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED FOR A CONTINUING PROGRAM
OF APPROXIMATELY 40 PCV'S APPEAR TO BE ABOUT RIGHT.
WE HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT THE MIX WILL CHANGE WHICH MAY
REQUIRE PROVISION OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF AID RESOURCES.
AS PEACE CORPS MOVES FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS TO BASIC HUMAN NEEDS
PROGRAMS IN HEALTH AND FOOD AREAS, WE FORESEE THE
NEED FOR AT LEAST \$20,00 IN SELF-HELP FUNDS FOR
APPLICATION TO PROGRAMMING AIMED TOWARD ADOPTING
APPROPRIATE LOCAL TECHNOLOGY. THIS MINIMAL ALLOCATION
WOULD CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO ACHIEVING OUR
OBJECTIVE OF SUPPORT FOR GABONESE DEVELOPMENT AND
HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION.

5. PLEASE ADVISE IF FURTHER FORMAL SUBMISSION BY
AIRGRAM TO COMPLY WITH REFTTEL (B) AND (C) REQUIRED.

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